

## A Situated Political Philosophy: Pragmatism, the Ontological Turn and the Question of Normativity

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In recent years, there has been an explosion of new approaches in political theory. Circling around the dominant ideal forms of liberal political thought, these alternative frameworks (new realism, radical democratic theory) have often had the question of normativity at the centre of their concerns. Disagreeing over the foundations of political thought and action, they often have had the implied duty to prove that they still contain normative resources for political thinking; that is, that they not only critique, but can participate in the active reconstruction of values and institutions.

The debate over normativity (and critique as well) has been significantly affected by the critiques of philosophical foundations and metaphysics that have been variously articulated over recent decades. All of these arguments circle around what has been called *the problem of justification*: This is the problem of how to justify the explicit normative claims and implicit normative assumptions that guide both socio-political criticism and reconstruction. On the one hand, in light of these critiques we must acknowledge the historical and cultural specificity of knowledge and normative claims. On the other, we must be capable of democratic political action in an increasingly globalized world; that is, in spite of the pluralism of explanatory and normative frameworks (both within political theory and across cultures), democratic reasoning and practice require the capacity to make diagnostic (critical) and normative (reconstructive) claims within politics

Within contemporary methodological debates, several such traditions pursue normative resources in explicitly nonfoundational frameworks. Such *normativity without foundations* attempts to delineate how we might make normative political claims without implicitly positing universal philosophical foundations as justification. This paper engages two of these, pragmatism and the ontological turn in contemporary Continental political thought, in a comparative analysis around the capacity for such a nonfoundational normativity. Engaging their respective methods for political thought it focuses on the common turn to strategies of critical reflexivity within their respective normative frameworks. This resource, for both, speaks to the need of normative frameworks to have some type of theoretical mechanism which prevents the absolutization of their own standards allowing for both present plurality and historical change.

Focusing on the work of Richard Rorty and William E. Connolly, representing pragmatism and the ontological turn respectively, this paper illustrates their common normative project while distinguishing the manners in which they pursue it. Focusing on a recent surge of interest in pragmatism and re-readings of Rorty, it argues that he more effectively provides for this critical reflexivity and normative reconstruction than Connolly's ontological method. While both Rorty and Connolly turn to situated modes of political analysis and the reconstruction of philosophical naturalism as the basis for this, it argues that Rorty's implicit model (which does require explication and development) avoids the problems of Connolly's ontologisation of the problem of justification and more effectively provides for

the reflexivity they both seek. Finally, connecting this to other recent developments in political theory, specifically the genealogical critical political method of James Tully, it argues for the presence of important methodological resources for normative political philosophy within Rorty's thought and the resonance between this and emerging dynamics within the field in general.